DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 138 086 FL 008 454

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TITLE The Role of the Bilingual Community in Mandated Bilingual Education. CAL-ERIC/CLL Series on Languages and Linguistics, No. 49.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, Arlington, Va.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Apr 77
NOTE 21p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bilingual Education; Bilingualism; *Community Involvement; Community Role; *Community Support; *Educational Policy; *Elementary Secondary Education; Language Instruction; Language of Instruction; Minority Groups; Parent Attitudes

ABSTRACT

It is the purpose of the present report to alert community organizers, school officials, and scholars to their mutual interest in securing community involvement in the planning and execution of bilingual programs. Strategies are proposed for bilingual communities to follow when confronted with mandated bilingual education. The proposed process is not a theoretical model based on studies in community organization, but rather a summary of successful strategies. The report focuses on the structure of the community and other interested parties, on the type of community organization required for effective action, and on the role of the community in setting goals for implementing and monitoring bilingual programs. Specific aspects of the planning of a bilingual program are discussed such as needs assessment including a survey of school children, the setting of goals, and technical issues such as language type to be used, materials, accurate assessment of language proficiency, and teaching personnel. (Author/CLK)

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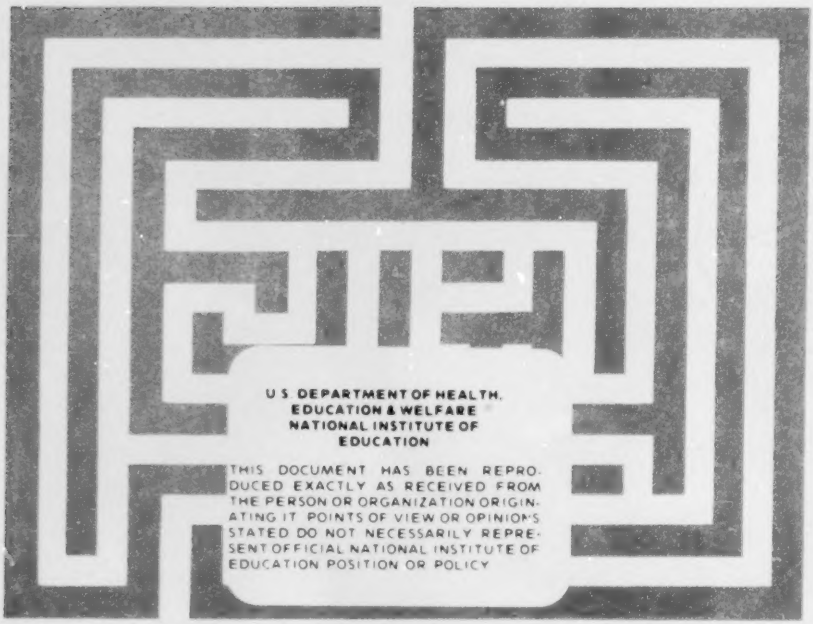
# CAL·ERIC/CLL
## Series On Languages & Linguistics

# 49

# The Role of the Bilingual Community in Mandated Bilingual Education

Maria E. Brisk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# THE ROLE OF THE BILINGUAL COMMUNITY IN MANDATED BILINGUAL EDUCATION

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CAL·ERIC/CLL Series on Languages and Linguistics

Number 49

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April 1977

## Introduction

During the last two decades, bilingual education programs in the United States have evolved from a few locally initiated programs to programs supported by federal assistance under the Title VII Amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and, more recently, to programs mandated by state legislation or court litigation.

Common to the first type of programs has been the involvement of ethnic and linguistic minorities in their initiation and planning. Discussions or negotiations between the educational establishment of a particular city (school administrators, school boards, and teachers) and language minorities, before a program has been created, have often led to an effective coalition that implements and monitors such programs.[1] Rallying around shared interests, such coalitions have recognized the varied benefits offered by bilingual education: broadened community participation in setting educational goals, realistic acceptance of pluralistic social and cultural objectives, recruitment of minorities into the teaching profession, and--most significant--improved academic performance of students at all levels.

It is generally accepted that well-planned bilingual education programs offer these and many other advantages that can be perceived by a wide audience. But it is not always recognized that the process of community involvement has made the difference between successful and merely ritualistic responses to the needs for such programs. In the case of mandated bilingual education, the participation of the community has varied, due to organizational and time constraints.

While most supporters of bilingual education have welcomed the gathering legislative and judicial support for bilingual education --as evidenced by new state laws, the repercussions of the Supreme Court decision in Lau vs. Nichols and the Office of Civil Rights guidelines that followed, and the connection between desegregation disputes and educational reform in many cities--there is a tendency to overlook one of the costs of such mandated efforts to pluralize education: a possible lack of community involvement.

This process of involvement takes time, so it is important that it be initiated long before the actual mandate takes place. Otherwise,

the rush to meet compliance guidelines can have negative effects on the quality and staying power of such reforms. In many cases, not enough time is allowed for an ethnic or language community to determine its own interests, and a hastily organized group may be produced which poorly represents community interests or does not reflect sound educational practices. Lack of a prior working relationship between the community and educators can be a source of friction, and efforts to get the two factions to agree to a common plan may fail for lack of empathy and common perceptions. Finally, there is a danger that the rush to comply will put a premium on general guidelines that do not take into consideration the unique social and educational patterns of each community.

It would be wrong to argue against efforts to mandate bilingual education. On the contrary, communities should take advantage of mandates in order to attain their educational goals, but they should be organized and cognizant of the issues, so that the resulting bilingual programs closely reflect what they believe is best for their children. Legislation related to bilingual education is only remedial in nature: it helps non-English-speaking children learn enough English to keep up with their monolingual English-speaking peers in the educational system. Community involvement and pressure can assist in the implementation of comprehensive programs that go beyond these minimal requirements to comply with the law.

Bilingual education already has considerable momentum. At least twenty-two states have enacted pertinent legislation.[2] As a result of the Lau decision, all school districts in the United States are required to submit periodic reports to the Office of Civil Rights that specify the types of programs they offer to children of linguistic minorities. A number of school districts have been found not to comply fully with general guidelines and have been forced to develop plans to service these children adequately. In Hartford, the bilingual community took advantage of the situation and developed a comprehensive plan for bilingual education with the cooperation of the school board and the office of the superintendent. There have been other instances where parents of bilingual children have filed suit against their own school districts on the grounds that for lack of a coherent program, their children were receiving an inadequate education.

In order that their children's educational interests be considered in the midst of integration, bilingual communities have also entered as secondary parties in desegregation suits brought before federal courts by both the Department of Justice and private citizens. This intervention has been a crucial factor in avoiding the collapse of existing bilingual programs. Assigning youngsters to schools on the basis of ratios of black vs. white has been justified as a means of improving education. The needs of linguistic minorities, however, are ruled by linguistic and cultural charac-

teristics and not by race. In order to have viable bilingual programs, an adequate number of children of the same ethnic group must be kept together, but this causes problems with desegregation.[3] In most cases, courts have ruled in favor of the bilingual population, but sometimes the wishes of the bilingual community have not been followed. In the case of Boston, for instance, although clustering of bilingual children was allowed, the courts did not permit the continuation of a special program for secondary school Hispanic children who were working well below grade level, because it was housed apart in a school with no children of other ethnic or racial groups.

State legislation, private suits, and desegregation proceedings have combined in some cities (New York, Boston, and Hartford, for example) to produce added pressure for bilingual programs. The rise of public-interest law firms throughout the United States will undoubtedly continue to spur such litigation in the future.[4]

It is the purpose of the present report to alert community organizers, school officials, and scholars to their mutual interest in securing community involvement in the planning and execution of bilingual programs. Strategies will be proposed for bilingual communities to follow when confronted with mandated bilingual education. The ideas expressed in this paper are the result of the author's work in the United States with several bilingual communities facing such a situation. The proposed process is not a theoretical model based on studies in community organization but, rather, a summary of successful strategies. The report will focus on the structure of the community and other interested parties, on the type of community organization required for effective action, and on the role of the community in setting goals for implementing and monitoring bilingual programs.

## Participants in the Policy-Making Process

### The Bilingual Community

The word "community" has many connotations. "Sociologists have grappled with the concept of community since Comte and before him, philosophers since Plato."[5] Panzetta describes three possible types of community: a horizontal (geographic) community, whose members have a relationship of mutual dependency; a vertical (institutional) community, whose members have a formal relationship; and a third type, formed by a group of people who come together in common pursuit over a period of time. In the context of bilingual education in its broadest sense, the word "community" refers to the last-named type--a group of people interested in the development and improvement of the education of bilingual children. In its

narrowest sense, it can refer to the parents of bilingual children attending a particular school. It is not the author's purpose in the present report to define the bilingual community, but rather to suggest how it can be most effective. Considering what Guskin and Ross have to say with respect to urban problems, the bilingual community that can exercise pressure and provide meaningful cooperation for improving educational opportunities must be composed of a broad spectrum of people.

> The last few years of urban crises have generated a new concern about the citizen's role in the planning process. Given the complexity of the issues and the growing sophistication of techniques in urban and social planning, many writers have argued that community groups, especially in low income neighborhoods, need the expertise of professionals to defend their interests in the policy process.[6]

Family, neighbors, informal groups, professionals, and formal organizations all have an important and different role to play. Hence, for purposes of this report the word "community" refers to a coalition of all of the above components. The specific composition of a bilingual community will vary, depending upon the social and linguistic composition of the school district in question.

Two major problems arise in the proposed organization of the community. The first is the establishment of communication among the members of a community that is not necessarily geographically defined. The second is the establishment of good working relationships among the various types of groups involved. Ideally, all of the members of the community should be informed of the various issues in question and their opinions solicited. The size of the geographical area and the distribution of its members will determine the feasibility of this task. In the case of Boston, when faced with desegregation, the Hispanic community formed a committee with one representative from each of the city's seven districts that had concentrations of Hispanic populations. Throughout the process, every issue was discussed first in the central committee and then in district meetings, with the representative serving as a link between the two. This system allowed communication with the community without forcing people to travel long distances. Another advantage was that a committee of limited and fixed membership could work more efficiently than one that tried to cover the entire population, but whose meetings were seldom attended each time by the same people.

A committee that is going to organize the community for the defense of bilingual education should include "grass roots" members, professionals (including lawyers, school staff, researchers) and organizational representatives. The problem is to get these groups to work together. Lay persons often distrust professionals, while the latter often try to impose their opinions upon their "clients"

without listening to what they have to say. Much effort is often wasted in struggling over power. The best strategy seems to be for the professionals to assume an advisory rather than a leadership role. Established organizations can help to disseminate information, offer meeting places, and secure funds. To avoid unnecessary conflict, the role of each component should be clearly defined during the initial meetings and the tasks divided according to who is best qualified to perform them. (The matter of allocating tasks will be discussed in detail in a later section of this paper.)

Educational Authorities and School Personnel

For many minority language communities, successful collaboration in policy making requires an understanding of the composition, leadership, interests, and constraints of the other groups involved. Situations differ from school district to school district, but the participants usually include a school board, a superintendent, monolingual administrators and teachers (often represented by one or more unions), and bilingual school personnel (who are also members of the bilingual community). The school board members and school superintendent are likely to be concerned with overall educational objectives--which include serving bilingual children, but not necessarily through bilingual education--and are sensitive to their own budgetary constraints in planning new programs. Principals, teachers, and other personnel often perceive mandated bilingual education as a threat to their job security and to their own concept of education, especially if their mission includes "assimilation" of minority students.

The members of the bilingual community must be aware of the particular concerns of these sectors and must exercise great tact and skill in presenting the case for bilingual education. It should be kept in mind from the very beginning that implementation of any plan, even when mandated and upheld by the courts, will depend upon the good will and support of each sector involved. It is easier to ensure the support and understanding of school authorities for the cause of bilingual education when members of the bilingual community are part of the school structure or have working relationships with it.

Bilingual school personnel are likely to exhibit, as far as bilingual education is concerned, attitudes ranging from reticence to assertiveness. Most school systems that have attempted to meet the needs of minority language groups have established a special office which must respond to pressures from both the educational establishment on the one hand and vocal members of the bilingual community on the other. Some bilingual school personnel feel caught in the middle and resent undue pressure from parents of bilingual children and other advocates of bilingual education. Consequently, it is important that these persons be made a part of the community orga-

nization so that they may better understand the position of the parents as well as provide the community with their support and advice.

Community members may also exert influence through election or appointment to the formal educational structure, e.g., school boards, school administration, and advisory committees and task forces with policy-making power. In this way the interest of the bilingual child will be assured in decisions carried out by educational policy-making bodies.

## Planning the Bilingual Program

### Survey of School Children (Needs Assessment)

An assessment of needs is the first step in the planning of a bilingual program. Community organizations are in a unique position to survey and evaluate the broader language and educational needs of their own school-age children. Such a survey, including information on age, grade, school attendance, promotion history, and language skills (in English as well as other languages) may best be initiated at the local level. A bilingual community can often make use of the tools and expertise of its local organizations or scholars who, in turn, can train parents and other non-professionals, who usually have more accessibility to the community at large, to gather the information. Even if this type of survey cannot cover an entire city or employ sophisticated and scientific measures, it can provide far more meaningful and current data than that employed by school systems. This is especially true when, for convenience, school systems classify children into language groups simply according to surnames--an exceedingly rough and usually inaccurate measure of linguistic and educational needs--or when monolingual teachers try to estimate students' verbal aptitude.

The primary purpose of a community survey is to produce information from which the community can determine its needs on the basis of actual rather than hypothetical data. In the case of Boston, the school committee and the school department's estimated number of children in need of bilingual education was markedly lower than the figure provided by an informal survey carried out by the "Comité de Padres." Fortunately, desegregation plan calculations on space and personnel needed for bilingual programs were based on the latter, which proved to be more accurate.

When the community is engaged in conducting such surveys, an additional benefit occurs. The broadened support from the community in the area surveyed may produce a new level of community consciousness and considerable volunteer help for later stages. Thus, the

survey can become the first step toward community organization and participation.

On the basis of the information collected, the community can begin to discuss alternative approaches to planning bilingual programs and focus on realizable goals. In order to develop a plan, it is necessary to know the proportion of children at each age/grade level by neighborhood and with respect to the total school district. This will help establish the numbers of classes and teachers needed at each level and will help determine priorities. The linguistic ability of the children, i.e., language (English and other) and skill (speaking, understanding, reading, and writing), will suggest the type of language component needed. Data on the numbers of children not attending school and the reasons for their lack of attendance may suggest a need for special programs. For instance, the lack of bilingual kindergartens may keep children at home, or literacy problems may often account for dropouts.

In many cities, such surveys have uncovered information that has surprised school authorities. Distinctions may be found among students thought to be part of a homogeneous language group; for example, Asian-American children may have been classified as "Chinese" despite the fact that the group may comprise Thai, Burmese, and even Vietnamese children, for whom Chinese is an even more foreign language than English; "Portuguese" speakers, upon further analysis, have been found to include speakers of Cape Verdean--a language considerably different from Portuguese; "French" speakers in New England may be speakers of Haitian creole or may come from long-established Franco American homes, and so on. Recognition of these rather gross differences as well as other more subtle distinctions can be critical to successful bilingual education programs.

## Goal Setting

The bilingual community has to determine the objectives of the bilingual education program it wants to propose, the target population the program is to serve, and how this program will relate to the schools where it will be located. These issues are best defined by a coordinating committee of the type described earlier, with an organizational network that has the ability to disseminate these ideas to the bilingual community at large for its information and evaluation. Obviously, not everyone's opinion can be considered, but the members of the community should have the opportunity to learn what is happening and be aware that they can communicate their thoughts to the coordinating committee. The mass media can be most helpful; it would be a good idea to include on the coordinating committee any member of the bilingual community who works on a newspaper or magazine, or in TV or radio.

Each of the following issues will involve a choice of alternatives for the individual communities:

Objective. A bilingual program can seek to maintain the language and culture of a particular ethnic-linguistic group or groups; it can serve as a bridge to bring children into the monolingual English educational system; it can be used to revive a disappearing language.

Target Population. A bilingual program can be developed to serve non-English-speaking children or those with limited abilities; it can be directed toward all children of an ethnic-linguistic minority group or groups; or it can serve children of an ethnic minority as well as other children interested in learning the language and culture of that group.

Relation to School. A bilingual program can be separate or it can be integrated--to a variety of degrees--into the total curriculum of the school where it is located.

The choice of goal and target population will depend on the philosophy of the community, the characteristics of the children to be served, and the existing legislative constraints. In determining the relationship to the school, desegregation rulings will have to be considered. Once the alternatives have been agreed upon, the community can communicate them to the school board, superintendent, and monolingual teaching personnel. The process of negotiation, development, and implementation of the plan may be a long one. During the process, the initial plan will probably suffer changes. From the outset, one of the constant dilemmas is the choice between quantity and quality. Should a quality program for a few children be set up and then be expanded periodically until it serves all children? Or should a weaker program covering more children be established with the hope of gradual improvement? It is usually the case that mandated bilingual education forces school districts to provide services for as many children as possible.

## Technical Issues

The bilingual community should also conduct research, discuss, and draw up its conclusions regarding type of language(s) to be included in the program, curriculum, materials, testing instruments and procedures, personnel qualifications, and resources. The more detailed the information the community can provide to the decision-making authorities, the more significant its contribution will be.

Language Type. The language other than English included in the program can be an international language with an extensive literature; it can be of limited use; or it may not have a written system. Depending upon this, the language may be used as a medium of instruction for all or some subjects. If the language is not written, it

can either be used orally or a writing system can be developed, which is a much more complex task.[7]

Curriculum. Decisions have to be made as to how the languages will be taught, what language(s) will be used as a medium of instruction in the teaching of subject matter, what subject matter will be included, and how the culture of the children is going to be reflected in the curriculum.[8]

Materials. Materials can be commercially produced, developed at special centers, or teacher-developed. Availability and type of language and curriculum will influence decisions on materials. Materials should be evaluated for quality and for language and content level.[9]

Testing Instruments and Procedures. Tests can be used to determine placement or progress and, in certain types of programs, to ascertain eligibility for and completion of the program. It is important to locate appropriate instruments and to ensure that the personnel administering these tests are qualified to do so. The issue of testing is particularly important, because some of the most crucial decisions in the program are based on test results.[10]

Personnel Qualifications. Teachers and other personnel should be qualified in their particular field or subject area and should also have a degree of fluency in English and another language; they should know about first and second language acquisition and acquisition of reading and writing skills; they should be acquainted with the behavior patterns, value systems, and cognitive styles of the two cultures; they should know what methods, curricula, materials, and tests are applicable to the bilingual situation; and they should know how to work with parents of bilingual children. Teacher preparation will have to be inservice in most cases, until there are enough graduates of recently begun teacher-training programs to fill the positions available. Waiver systems have been used in some cases where qualified personnel lacked certification.[11]

Bilingual programs are already in operation in many communities. A survey and evaluation of these programs should be the first step toward solving some of these technical problems. The bilingual community should also make an inventory of its available human resources with regard to language ability, professional background, and possible role in the program (with or without further training). Community agencies can be most helpful in gathering this type of information. This strategy helps to prevent charges of inability to start a program due to lack of personnel and to avoid unfair hiring practices.

The tasks described in the three preceding sections are too numerous and complex for any one small group of individuals to undertake.

All of the various components of the bilingual community should assume specific roles, since functional specialization can produce better results. Bilingual teachers and parents are most suited to reach other parents to collect information and provide feedback during the various stages of the planning. Bilingual school personnel can help obtain information on the current school situation, the needs of the children, and--if there is already some bilingual education--which educational strategies seem to work best and which materials and tests seem most appropriate. Professionals and bilingual experts associated with universities and planning agencies can provide results of research and whatever information that is applicable to the particular situation. They can also assist in the dissemination of information by teaching persons who have direct access to the parents about the rationale and basis for bilingual education. They can also cooperate in interpreting the data collected on the children, curriculum design, and selection of materials and tests. Universities can further cooperate by developing teacher-training programs.

## Program Development

School districts often find themselves at a loss when they are required to start or expand bilingual education programs. A number of questions immediately arise: What kind of program? Where do we find teachers and materials? How many and which children should be included? The community should take advantage of this situation and propose their own plan based on the data collected and decisions made during the preparatory stages. This procedure has several advantages: the usual delays caused by needs assessments and planning procedures having to be conducted by school officials with little or no experience in bilingual education can be avoided, and the community will be ensured of participation in the choice of curricula, materials, personnel, and other elements of the program. For this to happen, however, it is crucial for the community to be prepared and to have established working relationships with the school system.

Two other important issues to consider in the early stages of implementation of a program are the hiring of bilingual personnel and the scope of the school budget. The bilingual community should ensure that the bilingual personnel are hired under the same conditions as other school personnel and not--as is frequently the case--on temporary assignments that deprive them of job security and benefits. The community should also understand the school budget. The bilingual community must stress the point that bilingual children are part of the permanent population of the school district, which is responsible for their education. Consequently, funds for the education of these children should be furnished through the

school budget rather than only through federal assistance or additional funds.

The community's interest should not subside when a bilingual education program takes effect. What has been agreed upon on paper does not always become a reality. Therefore, it is important to monitor the development of the program. Representatives involved earlier in the planning stages may now play significant roles as monitors of progress. It is important that the monitoring representatives have the trust of the entire community and that their role be perceived in this way by all parties concerned. They should establish a relationship with the school district which will allow them to influence as well as monitor the implementation of the plan agreed upon.

## Summary and Conclusions

One often hears of "Coral Way," "Rough Rock," and "The Oyster School" as examples of quality bilingual education. The initiation of these programs was preceded by long-term planning on the part of the community and interested school personnel and long-term negotiating with school authorities. At present, the process is very different. Schools have received mandates to implement bilingual education programs, and lawyers and community groups are forced to deliver a program--all under extreme time constraints. The author has worked with communities where decisions were made which seemed best under the circumstances, but there was not enough time to consider the long-term consequences. Since legislation is based on precedent, the effect of those decisions will be felt by many other communities going through similar processes. Consequently, on the basis of the experience of the "model programs," it is proposed that communities start planning immediately in order to be ready for a mandate, rather than start developing a plan after the order has come.

Another important issue is the composition of the bilingual community. Increasing numbers of members of linguistic minorities are being trained in various careers. Recruiting them as part of the "community" alongside "grass roots" members is crucial if positive results are to be attained in exercising pressure.

The concept of members of minority groups' improving their education and social status without forgetting their community origins is no longer unrealistic. Ethnicity is becoming a source of political power. Membership in a particular ethnic group crosses socioeconomic boundaries. Having technical assistance furnished by members of the community provides--in addition to the more tangible effects--role models for its younger members, and enhances their pride in their heritage.

Because of budgetary, personnel, and other constraints, the community will have to set priorities in developing a bilingual program. The long-term plan, however, should include all of the components that could possibly contribute to its success and should reach all the children for whom it will be a better form of education. It is better to start on a small scale and plan gradual growth and improvement than to accept a better-than-nothing type of program of dubious quality. The best defense for the concept of bilingual education is successful bilingual education.

## NOTES

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1. Some examples are Coral Way, Florida; Rough Rock, Arizona; San Antonio Unified School District, Texas; and the Oyster School, Washington, D.C. See Patricia L. Engle, The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education, Papers in Applied Linguistics: Bilingual Education Series (Arlington, Va.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1975); Vera P. John and Vivian M. Horner, Early Childhood Bilingual Education (New York: Modern Language Association, 1971); and Luis Ortega, Introduction to Bilingual Education (New York: Anaya-Las Americas, 1975).

2. See Hannah N. Geffert et al, The Current Status of U. S. Bilingual Education Legislation, Papers in Applied Linguistics: Bilingual Education Series (Arlington, Va.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1975) and Series on Languages and Linguistics (Arlington, Va.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, 1975), ED 107 135; and Center for Law and Education, Bilingual-Bicultural Education: A Handbook for Attorneys and Community Workers (Cambridge, Mass.: CLE, 1975).

3. For alternatives, see José Cardenas, "Bilingual Education, Segregation, and A Third Alternative," Inequality of Education 19 (February, 1975): 19-22.

4. The two major firms are the Puerto Rican Legal Defense Fund and the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund. Local legal assistance

offices also take up cases, sometimes with the cooperation of one of the major firms.

5. Anthony F. Panzetta, "The Concept of Community: The Short-circuit of the Mental Health Movement," in Kramer and Specht, eds., Readings in Community Organization Practice (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), p. 28.

6. Alan E. Guskin and Robert Ross, "Advocacy and Democracy: The Long View," in Fred M. Cox et al, eds., Strategies of Community Organization (Itasca, Ill.: F. E. Peacock, 1974), p. 340.

7. There are at present Title VII bilingual programs in more than 40 languages. Many more are locally or privately funded.

8. For descriptions of different types of bilingual programs see Theodore Andersson and Mildred Boyer, Bilingual Schooling in the United States, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), ED 039 527; Andrew D. Cohen, A Sociolinguistic Approach to Bilingual Education (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1975); P. Engle (see note 1.); W.E. Lambert and G.R. Tucker, Bilingual Education of Children: The St. Lambert Experiment (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1972), ED 082 573; William F. Mackey, Bilingual Education in a Binational School (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1972); Manuel Ramirez III et al, Spanish-English Bilingual Education in the U.S.: Current Issues, Resources, and Research Priorities, Papers in Applied Linguistics: Bilingual Education Series (Arlington, Va.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1977) and Series on Languages and Linguistics (Arlington, Va.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, 1977), FL 008 272; and the Project Information Packages prepared by the Office of Education and available from the Bilingual Education Office of the Office of Education.

9. The Bilingual Education Office (Title VII, ESEA) of the Office of Education has funded a network of resource, material, and dissemination centers that can provide information on curriculum, materials, and tests. For further sources see M. Ramirez, note 8.

10. Two Title VII Dissemination Centers (Cambridge, Mass. and Austin, Texas) are collecting information on tests. Some other work has been or is being done at Hunter College, Berkeley, Columbia University, and other institutions of higher education. See also Ramirez, note 8.

11. Throughout the country a large number of teacher-training programs have been funded through Title VII. These programs can provide information on teacher qualifications. See also Center for Applied Linguistics, Guidelines for the Preparation and Certification of Teachers of Bilingual/Bicultural Education in the United States of America, 1974, ED 098 809.

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